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ABSTRACT

In this paper the chairman of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century reviewed commission discussions on education in the 21st century. The growing interdependence of the modern world is discussed including the results of the U.S. economic ideology of the Ronald Reagan era on the world economy, and the collapse of the Communist system. A vast economic mutation and the appearance of the new international division of labor occurred as industries were decentralized to places where production costs were cheaper. The countries benefiting from this development were intent on making their voices heard. Another feature of the emerging world was a no less important mutation occurring in science, which brought the information society and new kinds of employment into being. The commission drew up a preliminary list of problems, challenges and dangers that it would have to consider. The first problem identified was demographic movements and population. A second problem was bound up with the environment. A third stemmed from economic and financial turmoil. A fourth problem was the scarcity of jobs. Education and universal values were discussed. The end purposes of education are defined as: (1) ensuring the all round development of the individual and making that person capable of achieving self fulfillment in a pluralist society; (2) training social beings who were capable of communicating and discharging the responsibilities of citizens; (3) countering inequality of opportunity; (4) providing a response to the different needs of the economy; (5) providing opportunities for education throughout life; (6) ensuring technical progress; and (7) providing support for mutual cooperation. (DK)

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REPORT BY MR. JACQUES DELORS, CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMISSION

SO 024 453

UNESCO, Paris

After thanking the members of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century for the great drive and sense of innovation which they had shown in setting about their work, M. Jacques Delors, the Commission's Chairman, began his review of the first session's discussions, although he said there could be no question of drawing conclusions for the time being. The members of the Commission had decided not to follow any preconceived pattern but to proceed by a succession of approximations in an attempt to define the subject of their investigation - education - through a variety of approaches.

The Chairman began his review of the discussions by quoting something that Professor Carneiro had said, which in his opinion expressed what had been uppermost in the Director-General's mind when he set the Commission up, namely "education can make a difference". This was an assertion that education could contribute to making the frighteningly complex and risk-fraught world in which we lived a better place - even if reforms were not enough by themselves to bring about a change in human nature.

The changes taking place in the modern world

From the outset, the Commission decided to take account of the growing interdependence of the modern world - after all, the term "global village" had now entered the language - and of its wide-ranging diversity. There was, for example, not just one North and one South but a variety of situations within North and South. Without confining itself to a single development scenario, the Commission endeavoured to identify the forces underlying development, and the problems, challenges and dangers with which it would have to contend.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, the international scene had been marked by a series of upheavals and changes. When President Reagan took office in the United States, a well-defined economic ideology, supply-side economy, based on tax-cuts and financial deregulation, was ushered in. This led to a period of economic growth and job creation, especially in the United States, but it also created the enormous "financial bubble" which was one of the causes of the market crash in 1987. This had far-reaching repercussions. It became easier to take over businesses than to create them, and financial deals outstripped economic activity proper. These developments had not been without their impact on education since the point was reached when money, having become all-powerful, changed cultural and moral attitudes. Education had felt the consequent repercussions and the societies in which we lived were still being affected by the resulting loss of balance.

The Chairman then turned to another important event of recent years - the collapse of the Communist system from 1989 onwards, which had given rise to so many hopes. Everyone knew that the countries freed from the grip of totalitarianism were now facing a hard time as they tried to build democracy and, at the same time, adapt their economies to the international situation. The release of forces that had been stifled for far too long was also leading to tensions between nations and ethnic groups, as the tragedy of Yugoslavia and other bloody conflicts, as in Tajikistan, had shown. Unrest among minority groups, and the appearance in so many parts of the world of areas of instability, were such a source of concern to the United Nations that it was beginning to envisage the adoption of a status for minorities. The war in Iraq and the start of the peace process in the Middle East could also be regarded as events that sometimes caused disappointment and anxiety and at other times brought a glimmer of encouragement. They showed a world that was, so to speak, "in travail", in the middle of a great upheaval, whose economy was unlikely to be capable of withstanding the after-shock of the bursting of the "financial bubble", visible in the decline in asset values and the debt burden of companies that had over-stretched themselves through speculation. The final outcome had been a financial recession, the extent of which was plain for all to see.

In this constantly changing world, the renewed vitality shown by the countries of Western Europe that had decided to throw in their lot together initially came as a surprise, but the European Community, in its turn, had not been able to resist the centrifugal forces at play and it, too, was now in a state of crisis.

This rapid overview of the past ten years showed that events could, from one day to the next, give grounds for hope or for despair and could lend weight to predictions either that the world that was on the path to unification or was threatened with disintegration. That was the uncertain context in which the Commission would have to draw up its report. The time when such conflicts would at last be resolved and when the "global village" would really come into being still lay far ahead in the future.

A new international division of labour

At the same time, we were now witnessing a vast economic mutation and the appearance of a new international division of labour, a phenomenon whose full magnitude the European countries perhaps still did not grasp. Industries were being decentralized to places where production costs were cheaper and the countries benefiting from this development were intent on making their voices heard. However, some economists were tending to mistake the impact of the financial boom, with the debt fall-out that was so glaringly conspicuous in Japan and the English-speaking countries, for another phenomenon, which also reflected a determined effort by the South to take its place in the world economy. We were now witnessing the economic rise of countries like Chile, Argentina and Mexico, or of Malaysia and Indonesia. A new batch of countries was emerging from underdevelopment and was striving for a place among the economic powers. This was a very important development in a world of diversity where the odds were still very uneven, since although the countries mentioned had managed to attain a per capita income of $ 2,000, there had been an increase in the number of those where the figure was under $ 200. We were accordingly witnessing, at one and the same time, a determined effort by some developing countries and the collapse of others, particularly in Africa South of the Sahara, which really was the forgotten continent where development was concerned. If the Commission was to take account of the diversity of the present-day world, it would have to be attentive to this new international division of labour.

The information society and employment

Another feature of the emerging world was a no less important mutation occurring in science, which had brought the information society and new kinds of employment into being. Economists were now agreed that jobs had to be divided into three categories: conventional production jobs, low or medium value-added jobs, especially in services, and very high value-added jobs which, in point of fact, formed part of the world of information and the sign. The difference was thus no longer between shop-floor workers and office workers or between engineers and managers, but a more recent one that raised considerable problems from the standpoint of education, at least when one had to establish a link between education and employment.

Problems, challenges and dangers

The Commission also drew up a preliminary list of the problems, challenges and dangers that it would have to consider. While the list was neither exhaustive nor completely new, it covered a series of parameters that its members would have to constantly bear in mind.

Among the problems identified, the Chairman referred in the first instance to demographic movements and the population. The earth already had more than 5,000 million inhabitants, but 12% of them, consisting of the population of the United States, the European Community and Japan, accounted for 72% of the world's gross domestic product, whereas a further 20% generated only 1% of the GDP. The gap was thus still vast, and yet the population was continuing to grow. Instances could, of course, be cited of ways in which this was being checked, particularly the very close link between education for women and population growth.

A second problem was bound up with the environment. It was probably not necessary to dwell on this after the Rio Conference, even though the follow-up did not appear to be matching the ambitions that the Conference had expressed.

Yet another problem stemmed from the economic and financial turmoil already mentioned. The economic and financial world seemed to be without the leadership that had at one time been provided by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank or, on the initiative of the industrialized countries, by the Group of Seven. After a brief moment of hope, the situation was

again one of chaos, and this obviously had significant implications for the developing countries and those in debt.

Lastly, jobs were becoming a scarce commodity. This was already true of the developing countries and was now becoming true of the industrialized countries. Should it be concluded that, in future, there would no longer be jobs, in the traditional sense, for everybody? Did the goal of full employment still make sense and, if so, did it mean the same thing as it did 20 or 30 years ago? If not, what was at stake, as Mr. Geremek had pointed out, was the very way in which life was organized, with its sequence of study, work and retirement.

The challenges identified by the Commission naturally included underdevelopment and its attendant misfortunes, but they also included social exclusion in the affluent countries. Poverty in those countries was a feature of exclusion that affected not only foreign workers but the native-born population, too. New processes of exclusion were thus emerging, since poor education often led to a loss of social status that was a cause of poverty. Although it was not an absolute rule, failure at school among people from very modest social backgrounds could very easily lead to their marginalization and then to poverty, through a sequence of developments that caused a loss of self-confidence and ended up eating away at the most elementary reactions permitting survival in society. In the Chairman's opinion, that was why it was important that Mr. Gorham, a specialist in urban development, was a member of the Commission. Poverty in the rich countries was still, in fact, mostly a problem specific to big cities and, above all, their suburbs.

The third challenge could be narrowed down to a single question: what could the nation-State do in the context of "globalization"? The nation-State was still the rallying-point to which people felt that they belonged, but all of us were already to some extent citizens - or at least inhabitants - of the world. There were obvious for this. To quote only one, it was not possible to fix wage rates in the textile industry in Europe without taking the rates paid in Morocco, Malaysia or other countries into consideration.

It was obvious what the changes were. They went by the name of wars and the other evils that expressed rejection of the Other. There was the break-up of former compact units and of nations - in the aftermath of Communism, for example - the upsurge of ethnic consciousness and the disquieting spread of racism and xenophobia. These represented all manner of direct challenges to education systems. Other great dangers included hunger and malnutrition, together with illiteracy, on which the Commission dwelt at some length. Lastly, there was creeping unemployment, although its consequences had not yet all been examined.

Education and universal values

The worldwide issues forming the background to the Commission's thinking prompted the fundamental question whether education could purport to be universal. Could it by itself, as a historical factor, create a universal language that would make it possible to overcome a number of contradictions, respond to a number of challenges and, despite their diversity, convey a message to all the inhabitants of the world? In this language which, ideally, would be accessible to everybody and in which the maxims and views of the West would no longer be preponderant, all the world's wisdom and the wealth of its civilizations and cultures would be expressed in an immediately comprehensible form.

The creation of a language accessible to everyone would mean that people would have to rid their minds of certain concepts and learn to engage more readily in dialogue. By its membership, the Commission, bringing together as it did men and women from all disciplines and from all five continents, offered every guarantee in this respect. What was more, the message that this language would convey would have to be addressed to human beings in all their aspects - body and mind, material and spiritual activity, private person and citizen, individual and community member. Why the word "community" recurred so often in the Commission's

discussions, although with differing shades of meaning, was because a person could not be fully a person without belonging to a community. This explained why there were such close ties between communities and the formal and non-formal education system. Hence, the first crucial question that the Commission raised was whether it was realistic or whether it served any useful purpose to plan for education policy to be able to convey a universal message. This question, in fact, coincided with the Director-General's ideas and echoed the concerns of UNESCO on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the international organizations, whose duty it was to adapt to a changing world in the process of achieving unification.

The end-purposes of education

In the light of these considerations, the Commission's members attempted to define more precisely what the end-purposes of education might be. Seven main purposes were identified.

In the first place, education should ensure the all-round development of the individual and make him or her capable of achieving self-fulfilment in a pluralist society.

Secondly, education had to train not just individuals but social beings who were capable of communicating, engaging in dialogue and living as citizens, and hence of discharging responsibilities.

Thirdly, education had to counter inequality of opportunity.

Fourthly, it had to provide a response to the different needs of the economy and working life in order to contribute to the progress of society. From that point of view, situations differed very widely. In the countries emerging from Communism, it was essential for education to be re-directed towards the economy and this was also true of research, all too often confined within an academic system that stamped by the ideology of totalitarianism and cut off from the world of production. It was absolutely necessary for there to be a kind of osmosis between education and research.

Fifthly, for these tasks to be properly carried out, opportunities had to be provided for education throughout life, as the Faure report "Learning to Be" had already advocated. An undertaking of this sort always needed to be begun over and over again. In France, for example, the law on continuous training, drawn up by the Commission's Chairman, dated back to 1971, but a great deal still remained to be done. The concept of an education that extended throughout life could, in fact, be linked, as Mr. Geremek had stressed, to that of a life-span in which learning, work experience, social life and citizenship were closely intertwined from a very early age. The Chairman said that, in his opinion, we were facing a genuine cultural barrier that was making it impossible to see the future. If jobs really became a scarce commodity, there would have to be a different way of organizing society. Leisure time should no longer be an empty period or a period of passive consumption, but should enable a society to enlarge and to develop. There was surely as much inequality of opportunity in recreation as there was in employment. What was education doing to teach everybody to make the most of their free time? Lifelong education had to rely not only on the formal education system but on all the non-formal systems, too. Every one of us had to be educator and learner alternately throughout our lives.

The sixth purpose of education would be to ensure technical progress, bring it under control, spread it, and increase its capacity for innovation. Exercising control over technical progress also entailed setting out to solve the ethical problems it posed. The Commission did not necessarily share the opinion of those who one-sidedly criticized university research while extolling the research done in industry. The education system was, at one and the same time, a factor and an agent of research.

The seventh and last purpose was to provide support for mutual co-operation between all human beings and to teach people to know one another, regardless of differences of religion, race and language. It was, as Mr. Zhou put it, to aspire to achieve harmony by building our own life in calm, so that we could better understand the Other.

The Commission's role and working methods

The members of the Commission took the opportunity afforded by the first session to clarify certain concepts - such as modernity and modernization - and to study the documents prepared by the Secretariat, including the one by Mr. Tedesco, the Director of the IBE, on the reasons for the failure of educational reforms. In this connection, the Chairman said that it was also for the Commission to provide decision-makers with facts to help them draw up educational policies, and not just to conduct a purely descriptive exercise or to outline a philosophy of education systems.

The members of the Commission agreed to prepare an initial series of papers all linked to the themes of education and culture, education and development, and education and work, which the Chairman had put to the Executive Board.

The Commission proposed to draw on the experience acquired by UNESCO in order to go deeper into the specific problems of education, such as how to conduct a successful reform - a difficult exercise in political and social engineering - and how to finance it.

The fact that the Commission would hold its sessions in different regions of the world would also give it an opportunity to listen to the people involved locally and to have a better view of the differences existing and the wide variety of needs.

It would also be necessary to attempt to establish a link between economic and social factors, which was not just a matter of feeling but one of technology. There was a give-and-take relationship between the economic and social spheres, since the economic sphere generated social progress but could achieve nothing without the social dimension. By meeting the representatives of other international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and UNEP, the Commission could ascertain to what extent and in what ways education was taken into account in their projects.

Lastly, the Commission would have to ask itself whether its report would be addressed to specialists or whether it would be aimed at sparking off, at some point or other, a debate that would go beyond the world of education and teachers and involve parents, children, business leaders, trade unionists and various associations engaged in giving education a more effective role. From that point of view, the Commission had ambitious aims, since it was setting out to put education back into an evolving world full of the unexpected hazards that it was precisely the task of education to make it possible to face. Even in times of uncertainty, education had to equip the men and women of the present day and tomorrow so as to help them to know each other better, have confidence in themselves, hold out their hands to others, work together and create welcoming communities that strengthened the feeling that we all belonged to the same global village.